

Isle Unto Ourselves by PomegranatePomsom

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Summary:

A harmless comment is enough to set Laurie off, but she isn't exactly sure why. Luckily, there's always someone there for her while she figures it out.

Isle Unto Ourselves

Author's Note:

- For [SuperNova_23853](#).

"Wow Pompom, you can write GOIRLS?" Yes, sweet reader, I can.

This is for my buddy Nova. Thank you again, friend.
<3

Title is a reference to the Miracle Musical song.

It is by the fireside one evening, when Jeff offhandedly mentions the existence of his boyfriend, that Laurie first realizes something is very, very wrong.

No, no, not wrong-- *off* . There is something off about the way that no one bats an eye at the information that someone among them is a *homosexual* . Nea even smiles at the comment-- smiles! As if that were something to smile about.

As if it weren't all fire and brimstone.

It shouldn't affect Laurie as much as it does-- she's not old and backwards like her parents or the geezers she sees in church-- but she feels a stone drop into her stomach, forcing her to stand and walk away into the darkness. She can't look at Jeff, look at those people, without feeling something inside her ache.

Her friends call after her, but she doesn't hear them, too focused on getting somewhere quiet, somewhere she can be alone and breathe

without risking someone seeing her cry. If she can just have a moment to herself, surely she can suppress these sudden, overwhelming thoughts. Surely she can suppress the shame.

But she'll have no quiet moment, for as soon as she leaves the ring of light, she hears the crunch of sneakers behind her. Out of instinct, the prey drive kicking in, Laurie breaks out into a run. It isn't a predator chasing her-- not her brother, not some cowboy, not some teen freaks. It's a friend, and she knows she has no reason to be scared, but at the moment friend and foe both feel the same.

"Laurie!" It takes that gentle, strong voice shouting at her to cut through the fog of panic in Laurie's brain. She stops on a dime, but is too afraid to turn to her pursuer.

Nancy is at her side in a second, circling to her front. She looks Laurie up and down, her brow knitted, confused and concerned. Laurie stands firmly in place, her arms locked stiffly at her sides. Her clenched fists are shaking. Her head is hanging, her eyes are screwed shut. If Laurie is crying, she prays Nancy can't see her tears in the dark.

"What happened?" Nancy asks. "Laurie, are you okay?"

Laurie *feels* her lips trembling, *feels* her teeth chattering. She snuffles, jerking her clammy fists up to hide her face. Breathing is hard, talking is harder; her voice is hidden somewhere, a tidepool buried beneath the roaring waves. Nancy hears it, no doubt-- the pathetic little sounds Laurie is making. That's why she reaches out, why she touches Laurie's arm.

Laurie jumps back, finally dislodged from her sedimentary spot on the ground. She stares at Nancy with wide, wet eyes, her vision searching Nancy, assessing her intent. Nancy remains still, hands up and quiet. Nonthreatening.

It takes a long, quiet beat, but eventually Laurie finds her voice. It's scratchy and pathetic and very much unlike herself. "I'm sorry," she says.

"You don't need to apologize." Nancy shakes her head. "Are you okay?"

Laurie lets out a shuddering breath, tucking a lock of hair behind her ear. "I'm uhh, yeah. Yeah I'm okay." She shrugs and tries to smile, only half succeeding.

Nancy glances back at the fire, which is a speck in the distance. Any farther, she worries, and they'd have gotten lost in the fog. She's glad she managed to stop Laurie before that happened, at least. "Did someone say something? Like, were they being jerks to you? I didn't catch anything like that, I'm sorry."

"No, no! No one said anything wrong."

Nancy doesn't break sight of the fire, as if looking away from it would make it disappear. Laurie notes that Nancy is so *beautiful* in profile. She's got a strong jaw, piercing eyes, a confident stance.

And she's mature-- more mature than the circles of popular girls Laurie ran in back home, but she isn't bitter or cynical. She's curious, but not stupid. She's saved Laurie's ass more times than she could count. She's...

Laurie's stomach twists, as if a fist has been thrust into her abdomen and maliciously curled around her gut. She tries to bite back the sob that rises in her throat, but fails disastrously. The sound rips from her, stealing Nancy's attention back.

Their eyes meet.

I'm a monster , Laurie realizes. This nameless, desperate feeling-- it makes her a monster. She sinks to the hard dirt, and she grasps fistfuls of grass in a vain attempt at keeping herself grounded.

Nancy calls her name again, dropping down beside her. She rests a hand on her back; it's meant to be comforting, but the touch sends Laurie into hysterics, everything she'd been holding back finally springing forth. Nancy opens her mouth to ask, again, *what's wrong?* but decides against it, opting instead to simply kneel by her friend's side. Laurie isn't in a state to speak, and even if she were, she obviously doesn't want to tell the truth. So Nancy holds her, rubbing her back until the tears dry up.

Laurie always pushes herself too damn hard, Nancy notes. It's only natural that she would reach the breaking point sooner or later. She isn't sure what exactly had set Laurie off, but this crying spell has been a long time coming. Laurie tries too hard to keep her feelings hidden, to be strong and reliable and completely unfazed by the trauma around them, even to her own detriment.

Nancy doesn't want to undermine that, because Laurie's doggedness has helped keep them all going. Her insistence on teaching all the newcomers how to defend themselves against persistent killers has been especially invaluable. But that doggedness is hurting her now, somehow, somehow, Nancy just knows it.

When Laurie's finally calmed down, Nancy takes her hands, squeezing them. Laurie doesn't shrink away, but she can't meet her eye, either.

"Laurie." Nancy says, all business now. "Talk to me. I'm your friend."

"It's *because* you're my friend that I can't!"

Nancy thinks back to a few minutes ago, when they sat by the fire. Laurie hadn't been tense, or even quiet, until she'd suddenly seized up and ran off. What had happened? No one had really been talking, except Jeff. What had he said? Something about his boyfriend back home? That wasn't all that weird, was it? Not to Nancy, anyway. When you've dealt with demon-aliens and your little brother crushing on a kid with ESP, the idea of a guy having a boyfriend is pretty mundane. But Laurie is accustomed to more mundane horrors-- or, at least she was back home, so maybe she's not used to that kind of thing.

But that isn't enough to shake her up this badly, is it? It can't be. Laurie isn't uptight like that. So why..?

A thought hits Nancy like a sidewalk covered in black ice. "Laurie--
Laurie, are you ..?"

Laurie knits her brows up, looking ready to cry again, but too dried of tears to do it. She settles her fists into her lap. "I'm not sure," she whispers. "I- I... think so. I'm sorry."

"Don't be!" Nancy hugs her-- *envelopes* her in a hug as crushing as a petite teen girl can muster. "That's nothing, okay? Nothing. You don't ever have to be sorry for that."

Laurie hovers her hands over Nancy's back, as if trying to feel the heat exuding from a hot stove burner, then slowly, *so slowly*, returns the hug. She presses her face into the crook of Nancy's neck and she sighs. She lets the tension fade, lets herself go limp in those arms.

"Thank you," she mutters, though it's muffled in Nancy's skin and comes out as only a vibration.

Nancy gives her another squeeze. "You're welcome. And I won't tell anyone, okay? I'll let you tell them when you're ready. If you ever are, I mean. It's fine if you aren't."

Laurie nods, pulling away to break the hug. Not wanting to be completely free of contact, however, she takes Nancy's hands in her own. She looks down at the space where they meet and she smiles.

They share a quiet moment there on the ground, with only their

breathing and the sound of crows to fill the empty air. They flex their fingers in the space between each other's, they flit their eyes down, then up, then back down again.

Then they giggle, and they smile, and for a little while, things... are fine. Things might even be good.

No, not might-- are. Things *are* good, for once in a very long time. There's no heaviness here in their little corner, no pain. Just them in the quiet, secret darkness, where no prying eyes can find them.

Laurie kisses Nancy. It's a soft, featherlike thing that lasts a few seconds at most, but it's still a kiss and it still stuns them both.

The dread returns to Laurie's stomach. *Has she made it awkward? Has she ruined everything?* She doesn't have the time to ponder-- to roll those feelings around in her mind until the guilt makes her sick-- for the kiss is quickly reciprocated. Nancy kisses Laurie.

"Oh!" is all Laurie can manage.

Nancy flushes, though it's impossible to tell in the dark. She looks away anyway, towards the fire once more. "We should head back, I think."

"We-- We should."

They stand and they move towards the light, hands still intertwined. When the light finally touches them again, Laurie can glimpse the smile that's painted up Nancy's face as she leads them back to their friends.

Laurie isn't sure exactly what the future holds, but that's all right. Whatever happens, at least she knows she's loved.